



# EPA earmarks another \$4 million

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Special to the Inter Lake

The Libby asbestos  
Superfund project is getting

an additional \$4 million for the current calendar year, Environmental Protection Agency officials announced last week.

A portion of the funding will be dedicated to the removal of asbestos-contaminated vermiculite at the former Stimson mill property, now owned by the Lincoln County Port Authority.

The additional money includes \$2 million from EPA headquarters and \$2 million from the Region 8 budget, said

assistant regional administrator Max Dodson. An estimated \$500,000 is earmarked for the mill cleanup, which will help get the site ready to provide "some sort of economic stimulus for Libby," Dodson said.

"We're willing to move in that direction and use our resources at our regional office," he said.

Meeting with the county commissioners Wednesday morning, Dodson said there are plans to assign a dedicat-

ed on-scene coordinator to the mill cleanup. The candidate for the job, Craig Myers, has been working at an industrial site in Salt Lake City that was contaminated by Libby vermiculite, Dodson said.

Commissioner Rita Windom told Dodson the announcement is "really good news." She emphasized the importance of removing the mill property from the Libby Superfund site once the cleanup is finished.

"We want to see that as

## for Libby cleanup

definitive as possible, because that is our economic start," she said.

Dodson said the agency is committed to removing the mill site from the Superfund list.

"Let me assure you we are motivated to do that," he said.

Local project manager Jim Christiansen cautioned that the process won't be quick and easy and will most likely take a few years.

"This isn't going to be next year or right away," he said.

The EPA allotted \$17 million to the Libby project for the 2004 fiscal year, which started last October, but actually awarded only \$15 million in new funding after an additional \$2 million awarded during the previous year was counted as an advance toward the 2004 budget. Dodson declined to hazard a guess as to what Libby will receive for 2005.

"The thing about Superfund

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JUN 14 2004

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## More money for Libby cleanup

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funding is it almost changes on a weekly basis," he said.

Dodson stressed that Libby is the top priority for Region 8 and on a national basis "is very competitive on any scheme in terms of getting money to the site."

During a public forum that followed the meeting with the county commissioners, local asbestos-victims advocates Gayla Benefield and Les Skramstad were critical of the

agency's decision to allocate funds to the mill site while the cleanup of contaminated homes remains incomplete.

"We do need economic development in Libby, but the first priority should be safety," Benefield said.

People should be the first priority, Skramstad said.

"There's many people in this town who have been struggling for years to get their houses cleaned up, and all of a sudden we're put on the back burner," he said.